

**E. Zell Steever
81 Main Street
Groton, Connecticut. 06340**

March 10, 2020

Re: Statement on Train Service for Groton

Dear Mayor and Town Councilors:

I am Zell Steever and I live at 81 Main Street, Groton, CT. I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you tonight to consider passenger train service. I am here to propose and support new passenger rail service for Groton and southeastern Connecticut.

This proposal has two parts that are interconnected: The **first** part of the proposal is for additional train service going east to Rhode Island. The proposal is for the State of Connecticut to develop a new train stop in **Groton Center** at the intersection of Route 1 and Poquonnock Rd. (SW side of Amtrak RR Bridge), and add **Shore Line East (SLE)** train service to the schedule for **Groton Center, Mystic and Westerly, RI**. The schedule should be revised and extended to serve commuters in the region. In the future, connecting **SLE** train service beyond Westerly to West Kingston and Wickford Junction, and then to Providence and Boston will be important and key to a good **regional commuter train** system for all. This will, of course, require Connecticut to cooperate and partner with Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

This additional **SLE** service expansion would finally link east-west regional rail service connections between **New York** and **Boston** for the general public and specifically for commuters with the new train stops that would make it attractive for people to get out of their cars and onto the train.

The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Government's (SCCOG) **2019 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)** calls for **SLE's** "expansion to the east, with more trains, new stops and expanded hours." **SLE expansion is one of eleven regional priority projects of the MTP plan.** (Other specific rail projects are included: a study for a station stop in Niantic; parking/SOGR; various track improvements; and fare collection improvements.) Furthermore, extended SLE service east to R.I. is listed in both **Groton's POCD** and in the **2016 Connecticut State Long-Range Transportation Plan**.

The **second** part of this proposal is to establish a **new commuter rail shuttle service**, referred to hereafter as the **Norwich Branch Line (NBL)** (possibly light rail), as part of the **CT-rail** train service on existing **Providence and Worcester Railroad (P&W)** tracks that run along the east bank of the Thames River. The **P&W** Rail already connects Norwich and points further north to Massachusetts with the

US Navy Submarine Base (Sub Base) and south to Pfizer and Electric Boat Shipyard at the end of the line. The existing **P&W** rails and track infrastructure have been recently upgraded and support regular daily freight train traffic. The existing switching system and track infrastructure currently allow **P&W** freight trains to go either west or east on **Amtrak** rails. **Amtrak** and **P&W** rails run parallel to each other in Groton (three tracks). With a new train stop at **Groton Center**, this would allow passengers to change trains from **SLE** to the new shuttle service of the **Norwich Branch Line**. Initially this new service (three new stops) might run from the south gate of the **Sub Base** with a new platform off-Base to a new **Groton Center Station** platform and then on to a third and final train stop at the intersection of **Pfizer and Electric Boat** gates and Route 349. This would make commuting feasible by train to and from the Sub Base, EB and Pfizer, three of the larger employers in the region. It helps solve one of the "last mile problems" of public mass transit in Southeastern Connecticut, particularly in Groton.

The new **NBL** service would start a new **north-south** commuter rail service with a passenger connection to an expanded **east-west SLE** train service. (See Map 1) Additional new train stations/stops might well be considered in the future for both the **SLE** and the new **Norwich Branch Line**, if the service is successful.

Attached are maps showing the current rail beds and where three new train stations/stops might be located in Groton. (See Map 2) Expanded passenger train service on existing rail beds in the region makes good sense - no new digging required. It is nearly "shovel ready," utilizing existing railway systems.

Current situation:

The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) **Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) 2019 to 2045's** principal focus is on roads and highways and on the continued use and growth of automobiles and trucks in our region. The **MTP** cites the fact that the most prominent method of commuting to work in SE CT remains as "drivers alone in a personal vehicle." In fact, people drive to everything in the region, while walking, biking, buses and trains are the least prevalent modes of transportation. Both air and marine transportation continue to play limited but key roles in the transportation of materials and people in the region today. The **MTP** of 2019 lists 114 highway projects and only 12 bus projects and five train projects -- a \$2.5 billion construction program over the next 25 years with by far the most funding going to roads, bridges and highways.

History:

The focus on highways and roads was not always the case, as rail service dates back to 1834 in our region. This rail service was linked to marine transportation making the region a strong economic and industrial engine in southern New England, particularly along the Thames River and its tributaries in the communities of New London, Groton, and Norwich. By 1900 trains and trolleys connected much of the

region. For example, nearly 500 people regularly commuted to Noank to work in the shipyard by trolley each day in the early 1900s. The region's history shows that the train systems worked well both locally as a commuter system and later, as bridges were built, as a regional transportation link between NYC and Boston. Good train service is not a new mode of transportation for our region.

The introduction of the automobile and later heavy trucks resulted in the development of a network of roads and highways during the last 60 years. The auto/truck system has largely replaced the extensive network of rails, trains, trolleys and ferries that existed. The highway system has resulted in suburban sprawl in our region with new development being located away from our city centers of New London, Groton and Norwich and into farm fields and woodlands. After World War II and construction of the Interstate Highway system, suburban growth dominated the region, generally spreading outward along I-95 and I-395. More roads, bigger roads and wider highways for more and bigger automobiles and trucks have resulted in more traffic, congestion, accidents, reduced air quality, increases in CO2 emissions, and the ills of suburban sprawl development. Cars and trucks turn out to be both expensive and inefficient modes of transportation requiring government subsidies for highways, bridges and roads.

Is it now possible to change the present situation where roads and highways dominate transportation and development? While automobiles and trucks, particularly electric vehicles will continue to play important roles in our region, it is now possible to increase the use of modern train service, particularly for moving people to and from work, while using existing track already in the ground, as a starting point. Just maybe, if we "build it they will come!" but this time, using modern passenger train service and transit technology - happening worldwide.

What has recently changed in Southeastern Connecticut?

The good news was unexpected. It was announced late in 2018 that there will be an estimated **6,000 to 18,000** new jobs at Electric Boat (EB) to build one additional advanced submarine each year for the next 20 years. EB has started the \$850 million addition to the shipyard facilities at the south end of the shipyard. EB now needs more new employees. Currently **80% of all EB employees commute by automobile and live outside of Groton**. This commute is increasingly unpleasant and costly and will only become more difficult as thousands of new commuters are added to the local roads and highways and parking lots. This will turn I-95 into a more congested highway – linear parking lot during rush hour!

With a significant increase to the work force, Groton and the region need to consider if a linked commuter train service will be attractive for employees to travel to and from work? In addition, a number of municipalities support "smart growth," and a few of the larger communities support mixed-use development. This new passenger service will encourage and support **transit oriented development (TOD)** which, to be successful, requires well-connected mass transit systems of trains and buses.

Benefits to the Region:

The connection of these two rail systems at a **Groton Center Train Station** presents great potential for employees, employers and the public, as well as great opportunities for businesses. Improved train service will have many other important benefits: reduced air pollution; reduced auto traffic; reduced congestion; reduced commuting times; reduced need for additional parking at the major employers; reduced road and highway maintenance costs; and reduced CO2 emissions, to mention just a few benefits. The transportation sector contributes 38% of our greenhouse gases (GHG) in Connecticut. The proposed two commuter networks support smart growth policies, mixed-use development and transit-oriented development (TOD). Trains are a component of a modern, efficient, future transportation infrastructure for all, an investment in the future, which will stimulate economic development in Groton and SE Connecticut. It will support the ongoing relationship between shipbuilding and the US Sub Base.

This plan would also reduce the need for Amtrak to provide regional commuter service so it might focus on the high-speed train service along the east coast. It would also reduce the demands for road repair and expensive capital expenditures for expanding the interstate highway and state road system.

I am delighted to work with the Town Council, CTDOT and others to refine and promote the expanded use of mass transit, particularly commuter train service on existing rail beds in the Southeastern Connecticut. I hope this will assist you as you look forward in providing balanced public transportation for Groton and southeastern Connecticut.

I ask you to support this proposal and send a letter to Governor Lamont and the Commissioner of Transportation for Connecticut expressing your support for expanded train service in the region. Thank you.

I can be reached by email: zsteever@aol.com, or by phone at 202-251-2230 (c).

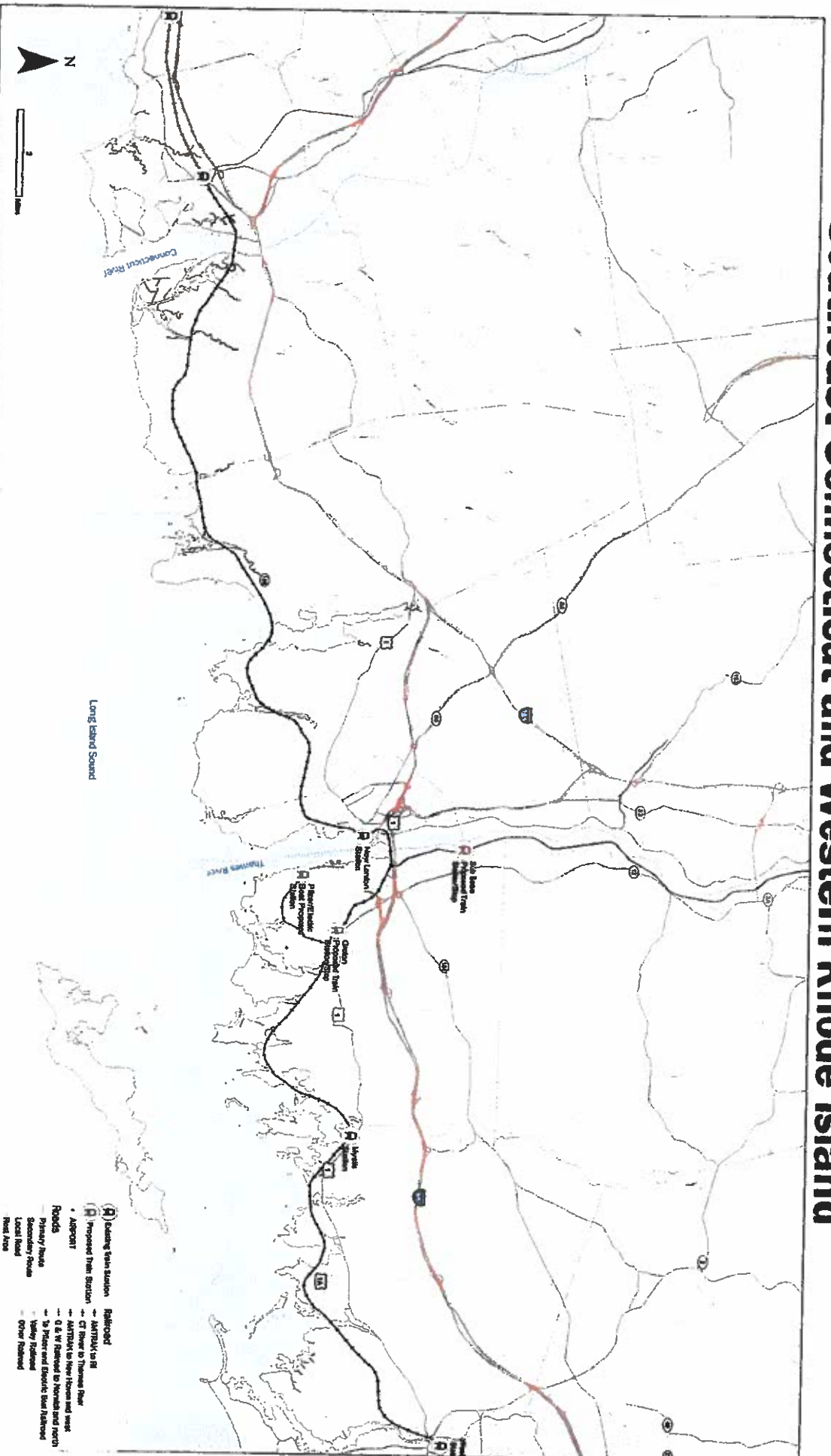
Sincerely,



Zell Steever

3/10/20 GTC: zsteever
Train Serv Ltr GTC COW 3 10 20 B

Proposed Extended & New Passenger Train Service for Southeast Connecticut and Western Rhode Island





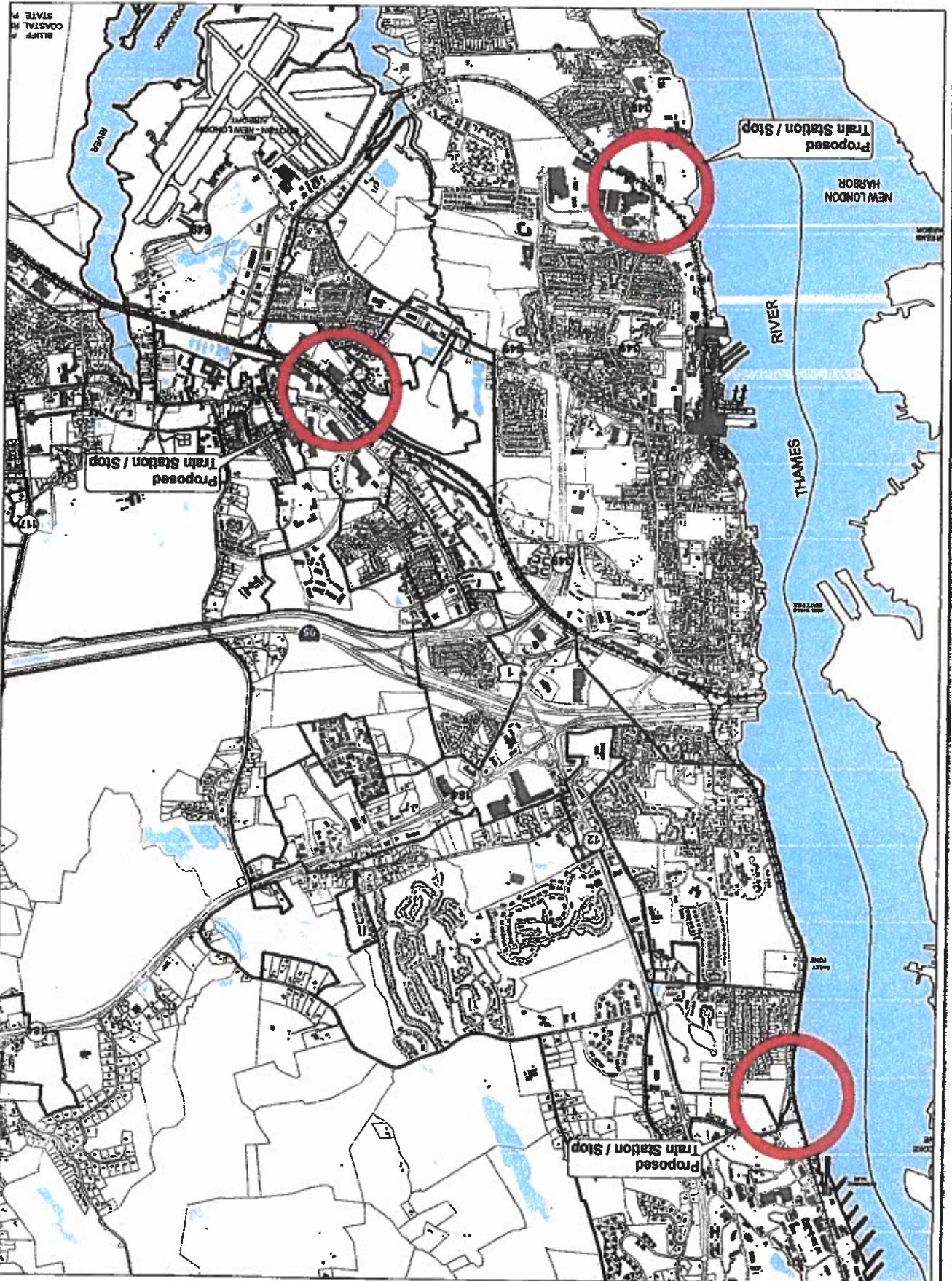
Town of Groton TOP Project

DATE: March 12, 2019

Scale: 1" = 1,000'



This map was prepared by the Town of Groton, Connecticut, for the purpose of showing the proposed location of the proposed train station. The map is not to be used for any other purpose. The map is not to be used for any other purpose. The map is not to be used for any other purpose.



Commuter Train Service, Southeastern Connecticut

A proposal to meet the existing and future transportation needs in southeastern Connecticut

The two sections are:

1. Expand commuter rail service from NYC to Boston (east-west rail) in both directions, from Old Saybrook to Wickford Junction on **Shore Line East (SLE)**; The final link!
2. Establish commuter train service from the US Sub Base to Electric Boat/Pfizer on a proposed new CT DOT **Norwich Branch Line (NBL)** (north-south rail) and then;
3. Connect the east-west train service of SLE with the new north-south passenger service of NBL in Groton and New London where larger employers are on both banks of the Thames River.

Proposal has Two Major Sections:

First - Extend the existing SLE passenger rail service east into Rhode Island for commuters with regular stops in:

Old Saybrook (existing)
Niantic
New London (existing)
Groton Center
Mystic (existing)
Stonington Borough
Westerly (existing)
West Kingston (existing)
Wickford Junction, R.I. (existing)

Shore Line East uses existing Amtrak tracks and facilities. Connect **CT SLE** from NYC with **R.I. MBTA** Commuter Rail to Providence and Boston, both directions.

Second – Establish new passenger rail service along the east side of the Thames River from the US Sub Base in the Town of Groton to the south entrance of Electric Boat (EB) and Pfizer in the City of Groton, with three new platforms using the existing Providence & Worcester (P&W) Railroad (now the, Genessee & Wyoming Railroad)

Establish 3 new platform stops:

1. South end of the **US Sub Base**, Submarine Museum, with parking;
2. **Groton Station**, intersection of Route 1 and Poquonnock Road, SW side of Amtrak RR bridge with parking and;
3. Intersection of the track between the gates at **EB and Pfizer** on Rt. 349, without parking.

An appropriate commuter train schedule would be necessary to connect the two passenger train services, **SLE** and **NBL** for employees.

Why expand train service in the region?

Electric Boat is expecting **5,000 – 18,000** new jobs over the next 20 years. The Groton-New London area has new jobs on the Thames River! That estimate is just for **EB!** And the **U. S. Navy?** These new jobs support economic development in Groton, New London and the entire region.

80% of the work force in Groton (26,000 individuals) commutes from out of town to work in Groton in single-occupancy, privately owned vehicles (POVs). 38% of Connecticut's Green House Gases (GHG) come from motor vehicles.

The new young workforce is **demanding** mixed-use development near where they work with the ability to use modern public transportation alternatives as well as safe bike and walking routes. The proposal solves rail service's "last mile problem" for worker, employers, and residents.

I-95 and I-395 will become parking lots! The public needs an attractive modern alternative to the use of cars. Southeastern Connecticut Council of

Governments (SECCOG) estimates \$2.4 billion is needed for just roads and bridges by 2045!

The SECCOG estimates another **18,000 more** people will come to live in the region by 2040.

Why Invest in Rails?

Expanded and new rail services are essentially “shovel ready” - no new rails, no major land acquisitions, and no major regulatory issues.

Uses existing under-utilized rails and transportation infrastructure – **Amtrak** and **Providence and Worcester Railroad**

Provides new and additional access to interconnected train service, both to local and regional communities from ***NYC to Boston*** and from ***CT to Mass.***

Will create enhanced Transportation Hubs in New London and Groton.

Will strengthen existing and new mixed-use development zones in the region ready for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) funding.

Supports and enhances “smart growth” and sustainable development in the region.

Reduces existing rush-hour traffic congestion and delays due to storm events and accidents on existing roads and highways.

Provides a viable, efficient, less costly alternative to the use of autos for travel.

Requires fewer parking spaces around centers of employment and shopping.

Is a safer way to travel, improves the quality of life and productivity for employees and the public.

Provides improved air quality, protects drinking water quality, reduces storm water runoff, reduces suburban sprawl, and reduces GHG emissions.

Makes the region’s transportation infrastructure more resilient.

Proposal is consistent with local POCD, SECCOG, and Connecticut DOT plans.

Issues to overcome!

Public's resistance to change - need to educate the public on benefits and values of **modern train** transportation.

Cost of service – both direct and indirect investments from both the State and the federal government will be needed.

Coordination and cooperation between the involved parties – public and private interests.

Planning, designing, financing, and operating a new, reliable, modern public transit system that works well is challenging.

Resolving regulatory issues with bridges on the Connecticut, Thames and Mystic Rivers.

Results - Getting the new passenger service operational and producing and benefits in a **timely manner – is key!**

Begin now! Study, plan, fund, promote, and operate - - a *modern, expanded passenger-rail commuter service in the region.*

Next Steps:

First: Letters of Support from our local communities and partners to CT DOT and the Governor;

Second: Support from regional, state, federal and private entities; and

Third: Public support and full political engagement.

The Ask: I am requesting the Groton Town Council instruct the Town Manager to send a letter supporting expanded and new train service for SE Connecticut to the Governor and the Commissioner of DOT with copies to the surrounding communities, the COG, our state and federal elected officials and our private partners in industry.

Finally

If we build a modern, reliable, efficient, cost effective public transportation system, the *PUBLIC* will come - - and our quality of life will become better - -

Proposed Train Service GTC 3/10/20
zsteever